

Records

PET SHOP BOYS Introspective (Parlophone)

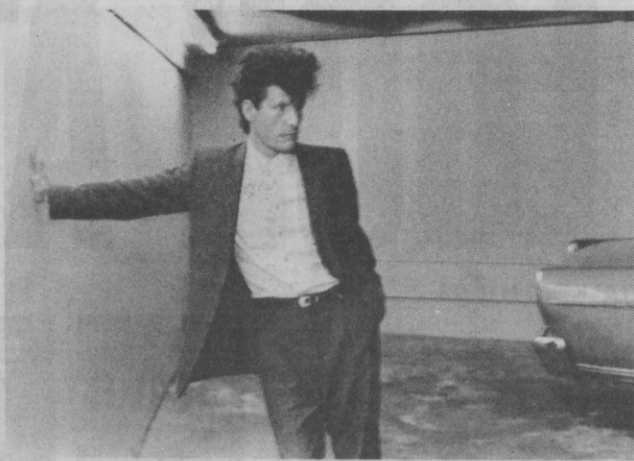
The Gilbert and George of pop: Neil Tennant, and the other one. The Pet Shop Boys are probably the longest running gag in the business. So is the joke getting funnier, or just wearing thin?

Introspective is a six-track dance album, riding high (or low, depending on your point of view) on the wave of House, Acid House, Acid Jazz House, whatever. It opens with 'Left To My Own Devices,' limp rap but a sound that's quite remarkable. An *Aria* vocal is swiped straight from *Fans*. The "rap" is "funky": "Turn on the news / And drink some tea / If you're with me / We could do some shopping." Smart bastards.

And so it goes. The deadpan 'I Want A Dog' ("Don't want a cat / Scratching its claws / All over my habitat"), the horrible Patsy Kensit singing through a sock on 'I'm Not Scared,' and 'It's Alright,' a cover of an Acid House track (why cover a music founded on plagiarism? Such reverent Boys).

Neil and the other one also visit Miami for "an authentic Latin Disco sound," borrowing the Miami Sound Machine's guitarist for a single, 'Domino Dancing.' It's fast, but lazy. As with *Actually*, the Boys prove their ability to take something fashionable and turn it into profit — something many innovators have difficulty doing for themselves. Note that coy cover too, designed to cross a few colour barriers in the marketplace. Start counting the minutes until Neil and the other one are being sampled and remixed by the same musicians they borrowed from for *Introspective*.

Trouble is, the Boys can't cut a rug. They quote hip-hop and house-quake, but serve up deadpan and pancake. This will be a hit because everything else they've done has been a hit and *Introspective* is just as cheap and nasty.



Lyle Lovett

And that's what pop's about, after all.
CHAD TAYLOR

LYLE LOVETT Pontiac (RCA)

Lyle Lovett writes country for the college circuit. His sassy songs have slick arrangements, bringing in jazz, western swing, and more than a little 70s singer/songwriter. Lovett's self-titled debut (MCA-5478) impressed with its moving songs and believable stories. As a New York critic pointed out, the writing could have been Guy Clark's, the (excellent) singing Jesse Winchester's and the songs, particularly 'Cowboy Man' and 'Farther Down the Line,' were memorable.

But as the chorus in the latter says, "It's the classic contradiction, the unavoidable affliction." On his second album the production remains as faultlessly elegant, but the artifice takes over. What once rang true, and witty, is now clever-clever. The best songs have a jaunty jazz feel, as on 'Give Back My Heart' and 'She's No Lady.' "And the preacher said I pronounce you 99 to life," he sings on 'Lady,' a typical Lovett story of men asserting their

individuality, beleaguered but not embittered husbands. A 30s big band provides a swing feel and gives the album a lift. But it's the stark ballads that let him down, with their self-conscious caution.

Lovett has the most original approach of his country contemporaries. He's expanding the boundaries of the music. But whereas the debut had credibility and a natural swagger, and melodies that lingered, this lacks the sincerity. Those with a more cerebral approach to roots music with probably love it, but I keep having visions of arts students trying on Stetsons.

CHRIS BOURKE

VARIOUS Human Music (Homestead)

Last year Homestead released *The Wailing Ultimate*, a patchy sampler that was carried on the strength of the half-dozen laudably exciting tracks which made it worth owning. *Human Music* has a few of the same bands, some new ones (including four from little ol' NZ) and a double album's worth of material. Trouble is, though, across these four sides there's only half a

dozen fully decent songs again. Which means even more filler than the half-length *Wailing Ultimate* and far too much pig-fuggery.

By "pig fuggery" we talk disparagingly of U.S. hardcore. The pathetic end of that genre, as represented here by the likes of GG Allin's 'I'm A Mean Motherfucker' only amounts to pathetic drivel, lotsa macho posturing in the name of "outrageous rock n' roll." See, pig-fucking music, unpleasant in the extreme. Crap.

At the other end of the spectrum, barely bestiality at all, lie My Dad Is Dead, a one-man band (multi-instrumentalist Mark Edwards) rockin' out at length to a cover of 'Time Has Come Today,' and the Great Plains, who I kinda like. B-52s-ish; y'know, lyrical nonsense, catchy quirkiness and trashy organ, but same as all the middling stuff on *Human Music*, it hasn't got enough inbuilt dynamics to really hold my interest. Likewise for the very ordinary offerings from Big Dipper, Live Skull, the Volcano Suns and others.

At the moment, playing *Human Music* involves jumping from peak to peak — the Verlaines' 'Doomsday' to My Dad Is Dead to a live version of the Cleans' 'Oddity' — whilst waiting to see if the Pastels and Chills are going to grow on me. GG Allin, Happy Flowers and Membranes aside, some worthy moments, excellent sleeve notes and good price. It's okay, it's alright ...

PAUL McKESSAR

BRYAN FERRY The Ultimate Collection (EG)

It would be nice if the word "ultimate" also meant "final," but Bryan is an unhurried hubby now and it will not be long before his label resorts to new Ferry/Roxy compilations to fill the long spaces between his solo albums. Ferry himself is on record as opposing *The Ultimate Collection's* release but, misgivings aside, it's a trim assortment — a far better compilation than the hefty and misleading *Streetlife* 2LP set. The album opens with a remix of

'Let's Stick Together.' It's not a remix by 1988 standards (especially compared to the Latin Rascals 12" mixes of 'Kiss And Tell' and 'Limbo') — more of a wax and shine job for CD owners raised on the lavish sound of *Boys And Girls* — but it's still a good song. The obligatory 'Love Is The Drug' and 'Jealous Guy' are also present — two of Roxy's most successful and least satisfying singles. More welcome is the exquisite chill of 'Avalon' and *Country Life's* 'All I Want Is You', a thundering piss-take paean matched only by 'Prairie Rose'.

Sage inclusions are the covers, all of which demonstrate Ferry's sharp ears and inventive wit; Billy Page's 'The In Crowd' from *Another Time, Another Place*, the Everly Brothers' 'Price Of Love,' and a faithful treatment of 'He'll Have To Go' a previously unreleased track recorded back to back with the sessions for 'Kiss And Tell' (try and catch Ferry's cover of 'What A Wonderful World,' too — real class). 'Help Me' was a USA-only release, co-written with Nile Rodgers during the *Boys And Girls* sessions. A mild funk workout, it pales next to its *Ultimate Collection* neighbours 'Slave To Love' and 'Don't Stop The Dance.'

The first five Roxy Music albums are still five of the best you could own; no compilation, for instance, could convey *For Your Pleasure's* conceptual fullness, or *Stranded's* tangles of tears and innovation. Ferry's new audiences are interested in his early work, but reserve their passion for the sophisto-romance of *Bete Noire*, *Avalon* and *Boys And Girls* — long, cool love songs served with a twist of weird ambition. *The Ultimate Collection* meshes the two admirably, but if you want an introduction to Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music, those last three albums would be the ones to hum into 1990.

CHAD TAYLOR

WINGER Winger (WEA)

That last Alice Cooper album was so over the top and heavy that bassist Kirk

Winger must have decided that he'd better branch out into something else or he might go as crazy as Alice. He's brought in guitarist Reb Beach and session drummer Rod Morgenstein to power along the rhythm. Kip does all the lead vocals and the rest of the band provide harmonies amidst the big wall of production sound. The songs are a nice blend of pop/rock and metal with good examples being 'Madeleine', 'Seventeen' or 'Poison Angel'. Special guests on their tasteful version of 'Purple Haze' is Dweezil (My Guitar Wants To Kill Your Mama) Zappa. Well worth checking out for those who like rocking out.

GEOFF DUNN

THE WAGONEERS Stout and High (A&M)

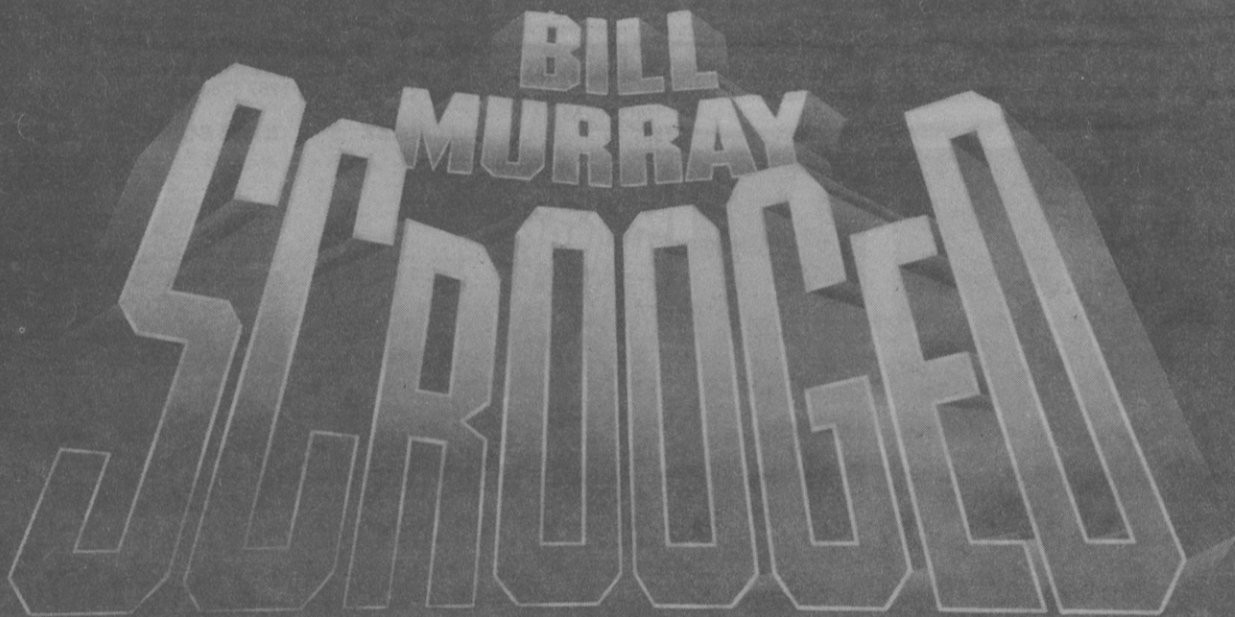
Looking like extras out of a Jim Mix western, the Wagoneers are a young band making waves in the influential Austin, Texas country scene. Mante Warden and Brent Wilson are the main men, and how's this for cred — they were introduced in Lubbock by Buddy Holly's widow, and cut their teeth backing Sleepy LaBeef.

Their debut — and A&M's first country album — recalls the honky tonk purity of Dwight Yoakam, with songs like 'I Confess' and the title track having the bite and searing guitar of 'Honky Tonk Man.' The standout is 'Helltown', a Texas Rangers' style cautionary tale that chugs along a walking bassline. However the bulk of the album has a mellow tone, with pleasant ballads such as 'Help Me' and 'So Many Mistakes' resting on assured playing and exquisite harmonies. The Wagoneers are like the O'Kanes, without the cloying niceness.

Like many of the 80s country upstarts, however, they err on the side of caution. Many new traditionalists turn out to be young conservatives, with the same problems as the old guard: finding killer material and challenging their own stultifying good taste.

CHRIS BOURKE

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